

## **Translation and interpretation the differences, the challenges, the qualities and requirements: A comparative study**

**Wisal Ahmed Mohamed Saeed**

Sudan University of Science and Technology, College of Graduate Studies  
Wisalahmed1974@hotmail.com

### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to investigate the role of translation and interpretation in our world today, the difference between translation and interpretation, do translators face difficulties and challenges to be professional interpreters, what are the translators' needs to be interpreters?. What are the qualities and requirements of both?. In fact translation and interpretation are playing a vital role in today's world they are needed in a wide range of societies and for different purposes specially business field, different sciences, conferences and large meetings, therefore the writer of this paper would try to shed light on the importance of translation and interpretation and what are the main skills, abilities, required for each one.

**Keywords:** interpretation, translation, differences, challenges, qualities.

## 1. Introduction

Interpretation and translation are different professions. Each requires a distinct set of skills and aptitudes, and most people are better suited for one or the other. While interpreters often work into and from both languages, translators generally work only into their active language.

Translation is the process of changing the language that is written or spoken in to another language. It is said that there are as many translations as there are languages in the world which reminds us with the need and importance of the art of translation. The importance of translation emerges by the reason that it is one of the important disciplines being very much useful in various spheres of human activities. Besides, a large number of languages spoken or written all over the world, and, as such, an individual would not like to be confined to one language or the native language only, but preferably would be interested to learn different language for a specific purpose. The need and importance of translation also arises when one wants to know the words or phrases or a language used in other countries so as to familiarize oneself for a particular purpose. Translation is also important when a person forms thoughts about how it would be possible to be mingled with the people of different country if he needs to stay in connection with the business or employment. Moreover, there are times that necessitate sharing beliefs, values, customs, practices and the social behavior of a particular nation. Newmark (1991).

Interpreting is one of the oldest professions since the evolution of languages. Communication among different communities speaking different languages was documented throughout history. We can spot many examples of interpreting in the early Muslim states when prophet Mohammed (pbuh) sent messengers to the neighboring empires, for instance Rome and Egypt. Presumably those messengers could speak one language and the hosting empire used to provide an interpreter. Throughout history, interpreting played a vital role in different eras and for many purposes. Elewa. Abdelhamid (1998)

However despite the obvious similarities, these two disciplines are very different and it's incredibly rare to see an individual who does both professionally. The problem arises from different areas such as:

1. Translators focus on written content, while interpreters focus on oral speech.
2. The time limit is a very important factor and forms a big difference.
3. Translators don't have to be fluent in their second language, while interpreters have to be fluent as native speakers.

4. Translators can use references and dictionaries (electronic or paper) to complete their task, whereas interpreters use their memory for immediate interpreting.
5. Interpreters need thorough training in order to be professional.

### **The differences**

- Translators focus on written content, read through their piece carefully and understanding cultural norms and beliefs of related societies, while interpreters focus on oral speech and language and dealing with real audience.
- When a translator begins to translate content, he or she will use professional translation software and a series of reference books and dictionaries before beginning transference process. Translators use their knowledge and research to understand the target country's cultural and linguistic nuances so they can write better translations. Naturally, this process takes significantly more time than an interpreter's rendering, which occurs immediately on the spot.
- Translators only translate into their native tongue and are not required to have great repertoire of vocabulary for an accurate translation. Though they aren't always fluent, translators can often write better than native speakers. Interpreters must have conversational fluency and relatively accuracy.
- Translations demand greater accuracy. While you may be perfectly capable of writing a coherent sentence, your oral syntax is likely to be grammatically incorrect. However, effective spoken communication doesn't require the same grammatical accuracy as effective written communication. Interpreters translate phrases and idioms between two languages instantly, which leaves a lot of room for inaccuracies. Conversely, translators have more time to analyze a text and research the best transference of meaning. As a result, translations tend to be much more accurate than interpretations.
- Translation professionals don't work at live events. Instead, you'll find translators in quiet offices surrounded by reference books and professional translation technology. While interpreters will be acting as a bridge of communication, their copy does act as an initial connection with broad audiences. Interpretation is needed in conferences, large meetings, court rooms and business meetings.

### **The Difficulties, Challenges and solutions:**

#### **Interpreting:**

It's no secret that top interpreters' jobs aren't simple ones, there are some challenges interpreters may face during interpreting process. Here are some major challenges a professional interpreter may encounter at any given time:

Challenge:1

The interpreter may face some difficulties in hearing the speakers words. When doing a face to face or conference interpreting, a speaker's audio equipment might fail, or someone may say something softly that the interpreter might not have heard. In certain situations, an interpreter is allowed to ask for the speaker for clarification,

Challenge 2:

Professional interpreters have a responsibility to have good cultural awareness and be able to fluently speak the target language and be up to date with new idioms and expressions. Social evolution provides new words and phrases on a continuous basis, which means an interpreter is tasked with being able to deliver any given word or phrase accurately into the target language.

Challenge 3:

To be well prepared before a conference or a meeting the interpreters will spend a day (or two) before the meeting or conference going over materials that'll be discussed or presented by a speaker. Last minute appointments or tasks can make a normal situation stressful when an interpreter hasn't been properly briefed. Pre materials allow the interpreter to go over terminology, familiarize with the topic's content, and provide time for extra research if needed. Without pre materials or sufficient time, an interpreter will go into the meeting or conference with confidence that their skills and experience will be their main asset while interpreting.

Challenge 4:

Due to cultural differences between societies the interpreter is required to be accurate in transferring the right meaning when the speaker say a joke or humor saying.

It's widely known that jokes and humorous sayings common to one language may lose its meaning when received in another. In some cases, an interpreter will have an opportunity to obtain pre materials or briefings that'll allow them to thoroughly go over what the speaker intends to cover. Success of the interpretations also depends on whether the interpreter has understood the purpose behind the joke or humorous line of dialogue. DOLLERUP, Cay and Annette LINDEGAARD (1993 -1994)

The above challenges may prove to be difficult; however, professional interpreters will be able to utilize their years of training to overcome them.

### **Translation:**

#### **Dialectical Languages**

There are about thousands of languages existing in the world, let alone dialects existing within these languages. Every single one of them is unique, with own origins, roots and structure. In a way, each language has its own complex way of functioning Idioms, expressions, compound words all of them make the richness and uniqueness of a language, but also represent an obstacle for communication.

Literal translation can be very tricky. Take, for example, Arabic. Not only is read from right to left unlike English, but the subject pronouns are actually included in conjugated verbs. It shows just how complex the way of functioning of each language is, and how difficult it can be for someone whose native language is completely different to learn and even translate Arabic.

These differences often create ambiguity, as words, expressions or sentences can have other meanings when used in a different context, which can cause misunderstandings and wrong interpretations.

Another factor which complicates the understanding of languages even more is the existence of dialects. Dialects are specific forms of languages spoken in particular regions or social groups. The interesting aspect of these subsets is that within the same language, different populations can speak in a completely different way, with words that have diverse uses and sounds which are pronounced completely differently. DOLLERUP, Cay and Vibeke APPEL (1995 -1996)

The complexity of such languages makes them very difficult to learn, but, at the same time, it is also exactly what makes them very rich and fascinating.

Dialectal languages are therefore a major obstacle the professional translators must deal with and overcome in order to transmit the intended message accurately, requiring a considerable knowledge and interpreting skills. It takes an advanced level of linguistic knowledge to get expressions, metaphors, jargon, slang and different dialects which is very challenging.

#### **CULTURAL AWARENESS**

Each community has its own way of expressing its own messages either through gestures, facial expressions or special phrases. Certain gestures, for example, are considered impolite in some

countries and cultures while they are frequently used in others, which can cause offense when actually there is no such intention behind it.

This is something translators have to consider as well. Indeed, the work of a translator is not going to be effective if not interpreted correctly.

In some cultures, people communicate very implicitly and you have to read between the lines, while in some others people are much more direct and explicit. This can also be a source of misunderstandings. Some cultures are rather neutral, some are much more emotional and expressive, which can make communication more difficult to understand.

When communicating orally, even more aspects come into play. Body language, tone of voice and attitude all play a role in understanding a foreigner. In some countries, people do not look at each other when they are talking, which is a matter of respect for them. On the contrary, in most western countries, looking at each other when interacting is normal.

The impact of culture is once more very important and translators should have a certain knowledge of the culture they are translating with to encode, react and transmit the message correctly.

## **SPECIALIZED TRANSLATION**

Working as specialized translator involves having sufficient knowledge and experience in particular fields. Translators have to be able to work with different materials. Whether it is legal documents, commercial documents or scientific and medical documents. Whatever the type of document is, a specific knowledge in the right field and industry is essential to be as accurate and reliable as possible, as it takes a knowledge of the right vocabulary, the right procedures, etc.

The specialized translators need specialized dictionaries to enrich their terminology in any specific field as well as be on line with any information and knowledge concerning that field.

## **TRANSLATING SPECIFIC CONTENT**

Translators who must translate specific materials like fiction have to transcribe a whole story, context, world and environment into another language. It involves creativity to transfer cultural values and traditions and to make them understandable and adapted without altering them: the translator has to remain true to the original piece.

When translating films for example, the right words and expressions should be chosen to fit each scene and maintain a certain coherence. Culture then plays a major role.

For books, literary translations are about transmitting feelings, emotions and transcribing metaphors to make the fiction travel in an adapted yet accurate way. It is often hard to keep the writing style intact, which is another challenge translators have to deal with. The same goes for poetry: it should be handled carefully to maintain the implicit message, the writing style and the beauty of the piece.

### ***Words with more than One Meaning***

One of the problems faced by translators during translation is when a word is spelled the same, but may have two or more different meanings which may often only be recognized from the context and position in the sentence, they are either ‘homonyms,’ i.e. words spelled and sound the same, but are different in meaning, or that are spelled the same but are pronounced differently. A good example of the translation problems and difficulties in English is the word (light: not heavy) and (light: e.g. the light of sun). This makes a translator’s job quite interesting when faced with these sorts of problems and challenges of translation.

### ***HOW TO MEET THESE CHALLENGES***

To turn translation challenges into opportunities and make efficient, accurate translations, translators should:

- Focus on meaning and ideas not on words: adapt the translation to transcribe accurately the meaning of the message and use the proper expression.
- Know about the specific field of translation, its technical vocabulary, its procedures: specializing in specific industries, fields.
- Be able to do some research, as doubts can always occur.
- Have good communication skills: to transcribe a message without altering its purpose and keep its actual meaning.

As you can see, to be suitable for professional translations and to work for translation agencies, that work with professional native translators, it takes more than just being bilingual. It is about being able to find the right words to transfer the right message in another language. The quality of a translator’s work involves translating messages and documents accurately and accordingly, which is a truly difficult job.

In conclusion, the problems faced by translators during translation aren’t made by the translators but are just part of problems in the translation of language. No language necessarily views the world in the same way so the difficulties in the translation process need the translators to find answers to the translation problems and solutions.

### *The Skills, Qualities and Requirements*

The translators and interpreters should have special skills and qualities according to their field of specialization. Here are the most important qualities for each:

#### *Interpreters*

- **Be an extremely good listener.** Interpreters need to pick up on every word, every intent and every meaning. They must make sense of a message composed in one language while simultaneously constructing and articulating the same message in another tongue.
- **Have excellent sensory, motor and cognitive skills.** All of these skills need to work in unison to ensure that not only language, but all nuances and idioms are picked up on and relayed in a comprehensible way, all in the blink of an eye!
- **Have an extensive vocabulary of multiple languages.** Because interpreters are working in real-time, they can rarely consult a trusted dictionary or reference materials. Therefore, good interpreters will have to have a very good knowledge of the subject-matter and the language and abbreviations or jargon associated with the subject.
- **Be culturally aware.** Just as specialist subject knowledge is very important, interpreters must also be aware of the culture of the languages they are interpreting from and into. If a political reference is made in one language, for example, a good interpreter will be ready to transform this into a comparable statement that the target audience can understand.
- **Cope with stress and self-control when dealing with difficult speakers.** Not everyone speaks with precision and clarity and of course accents can be difficult to discern. Interpreters therefore need to keep their cool and remain relaxed, even in seemingly tough situations.
- **Show emotional resilience.** Legal and medical interpreters are often involved in cases that are high-profile or difficult to witness, such as murder trials, emergency medical situations or even deaths. In such instances, they have to show high levels of resilience and control with the people they are there to represent. EDWARDS, Alicia Betsy (1995).

#### *Translators*



Many people tend to think that a person who knows foreign languages is a good translator. However, that's not necessarily true, as levels of knowledge of a language can vary. What are the qualities that characterize a good translator?

1. **Passion.** A translator should be passionate about their translation job. They should use all their means and efforts to deliver every project in excellent shape.
2. **Translation Skills.** A good translator must have a specific linguistic education. They should master not only the foreign language they work with, but also the skills of translation.
3. **Curiosity.** A translator must be curious and motivated to keep on learning new words and expression. The learning process of a translator should be never-ending.
4. **Rich Vocabulary.** A good translator must have a wide lexicon, not only in the foreign language but also in their mother tongue. This will make the translation process easier and the quality of the translation higher. It is also convenient for translators to acquire technical terms in specific fields, such as business, law, sciences, engineering, etc...
5. **Clarity.** A good translator's goal is to express the idea of the source text as clearly as possible, without ambiguity. They should avoid difficult structures when they can use simple ones.
6. **Translation Quality.** A good translator should be obsessed with quality.
7. **Resources.** In order to achieve the aforementioned quality, a good translator should use all available resources at their disposal.
8. **Accuracy.** A good translator should provide an exact transfer of information. Despite it being tempting sometimes, the translator should not correct the source text, trying to maintain its "spirit" instead.

9. **Honesty.** Translators are humans after all, therefore it is normal for them to not know some expressions or words. Nevertheless they shouldn't just skip it, but they should conduct research and note it down for future reference.
  
10. **Accept corrections.** A good translator should always deliver a translation that they can be proud of, but at the same time be humble enough to accept possible corrections from the editor/proof reader. The most important thing in the end is always the quality of the translation. WILSS, Wolfram (1996).

Being an interpreter is not an easy profession. It isn't just simply sitting down and translating anything the speaker says to the audience, interpreters aren't just a background voice, they're essential and a valuable extension in this presentation, if they weren't there, things wouldn't be going very smoothly; therefore they must be aware of a few things. There are many skills that an interpreter must be aware of and apply. Other than the obvious knowledge of another language; these are the most important ones to be successful in the field:

- Be familiar with the topic.
- Be interested in the topic.
- Be confident and have self- control.

To be a good interpreter, you really need five things:

1. You need an extremely high level of ability in two languages (or more). This means, not just being able to speak the languages, but native-level accuracy in vocabulary and grammar.
  
2. You need to have a thorough background knowledge of a wide range of topics that you might encounter in your work – such as politics, economics, finance, environmental issues and even sometimes even quite technical topics. A native speaker might understand such things, but not necessary “have the vocabulary or know how to talk about them in the other language.”
  
3. You need to have the skills associated with interpretation. This includes the linguistic techniques to deal with different types of sentences and things that may be ‘difficult to translate’. For consecutive interpretation, the speaker speaks first and then you interpret, and you need to be able to make detailed notes so you can translate everything they said in the same way to a high level of accuracy. For simultaneous interpretation, you need to be able to speak confidently and listen carefully at the same time, and be able to convert between languages at a much higher speed.

4. For consecutive interpretation, you might be standing on a stage with a speaker in front of hundreds of people, so you need good public speaking ability in both languages.
5. Interpreting is all about communication, so it goes without saying that it is a job that demands good people skills. From communicating with a client and securing the job, to dealing with criticism if something goes wrong, interpersonal communication is key. Interpreters are providing a service, and just like anybody who works in the service industry, they have to keep their clients happy!

***Conclusion and recommendations:***

- Translation and interpretation are very important professions in today's world and are needed for different purposes.
- Interpretation and translation are different professions. Each requires a distinct set of skills and aptitudes.
- Severe training is needed in order to be a professional interpreter.
- Translators and interpreters are always need to be cultured and up to date with wide range of topics and have mass information and vocabulary about specific fields.
- Interpreters need public speaking skills more than translators.
- Self confidence and quick responses are crucial in interpretation process.
- In consecutive interpreting note-taking is essential. The interpreter should use the common system used for note- taking by using symbols and abbreviations.
- Concentration is more needed in interpretation specially simultaneous.
- In simultaneous interpreting, interpreters always work with one colleague or two.
- More studies are recommended to be conducted in the same field in order to solve the problems that might face those working in the field of translation and interpretation.

## References

1. Elewa Abdalhamid. (1998). To Be An Interpreter.
2. Newmark. Peter. (1991). About Translation.
3. DOLLERUP, Cay and Annette LINDEGAARD (eds): *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 2: Insights, aims, visions. Selected papers from the Second Language International Conference, Elsinore, 4–6 June 1993.* 1994.
4. EDWARDS, Alicia Betsy: *The Practice of Court Interpreting.* 1995
5. WILSS, Wolfram: *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behavior.* 1996.
6. DOLLERUP, Cay and Vibeke APPEL: *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 3. NewHorizons. Papers from the Third Language International Conference, Elsinore, Denmark 9–11 June 1995.* 1996.